

# *Laura Bush*

March 7, 2019

Thank you very much for honoring my father, Harold B. Welch, as one of the liberators during World War II. I'm sorry I can't be there with you, but I'm glad that my cousin, Robert Welch, is there to accept the medal for his Uncle Harold.

My father was a member of the United States Army. His battalion, the 555<sup>th</sup>, was an anti-aircraft battalion. My father was a master gunner. He returned to the United States after the war in January 1946. Along with his meager gear, he carried with him eight tiny, 2x3 inch photos from Nordhausen, Germany, the site of the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. They were pictures of row upon row of bodies of the dead. My dad had written on the back of one of the photos how the line of corpses stretched as far as the eye of camera could see.

Daddy's overall unit, the 104<sup>th</sup>, the Timberwolves, had liberated Nordhausen. He was among the early wave of troops to enter the camp, sent to render aid and to witness what had happened at Mittelbau-Dora. Barely one thousand prisoners were alive when they arrived.

My father carried these photos home, most of them taken by one of his unit buddies. He wrote on the back of one that he thought the photo would look different, but the camera lens had been too small to capture the enormity of the scene. Some of the newly freed tried with their last remaining strength to salute their liberators. The American GIs dropped their heads into their hands and wept.

My dad came home to El Paso, but my parents didn't stay there long. Before the war, my dad had worked for Universal CIT Credit Corporation. When he returned, they offered him a job in the El Paso, Amarillo, or Midland office. He chose Midland. That is how I came to be born in Midland, Texas, in 1946. A couple of years later, another World War II veteran, a veteran of the war in the Pacific, moved to Midland. George H.W. Bush and Barbara brought their son, George, to Midland. That is how Midland came to be home to George and me.